

# Judicial Council of Georgia Administrative Office of the Courts



## *Annual Report*

**FY 2016**

*July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016*

Published by the Judicial Council of Georgia and the  
Administrative Office of the Courts in compliance  
with O.C.G.A. § 15-5-24 and by  
Order of the Supreme Court of Georgia  
dated June 12, 1978.

Director, Cynthia H. Clanton

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Cover Art: State of Georgia Judicial Building  
by Linda LeTard

## The **JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF GEORGIA**

was created in 1945 to develop policies for administering and improving Georgia courts. Judicial Council members and committees meet throughout the year to address specific aspects of court administration and improvement. The Judicial Council is made up of 27 members who represent every class of court: the Chief Justice and Presiding Justice of the Supreme Court; two judges from the Court of Appeals; the presidents and presidents-elect of the superior, juvenile, state, probate, magistrate, and municipal court councils; ten judicial district administrative judges; and a representative of the State Bar of Georgia.

## The **ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS**

was created in 1973 as the staff for the Judicial Council. O.C.G.A. § 15-5-24 charges the AOC with providing services related to court administration, compiling data, examining dockets and making recommendations for expediting litigation, acting as fiscal officer for the Judicial Council, and making recommendations for improving court administration and the judicial system. The AOC accomplishes these charges by offering subject-matter expertise on policy, court innovation, legislation, and court administration to all Georgia courts.

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Speaking to a joint session of the Georgia General Assembly, Chief Justice Hugh P. Thompson delivered his third State of the Judiciary address on January 27, 2016. “[A]s we move into 2016,” the Chief Justice declared, “I am pleased to tell you that your judicial branch of government is not only steady and secure, it is dynamic; it has momentum; and it is moving forward into the 21st century with a vitality and a commitment to meeting the inevitable changes before us.”

Many of the Chief’s remarks highlighted the great changes that have come to Georgia:

### **Population growth**

- Georgia is among the fastest growing states in the nation, and in less than four years, our population is projected to exceed 12 million.
- While the population of Georgia has nearly doubled since 1983, the number of Georgia judges has grown only 16 percent.

### **Shifting cases to the Court of Appeals**

“Modernization of the Supreme Court makes sense,” the Chief Justice said. “In a 19th century court system, when most of the wealth was tied up in land, maybe title to land cases were the most important. Maybe they had the greatest implications for the public at large. But as we move into the 21st century, that is no longer true.

“Let me emphasize that all these cases the Commission recommended shifting to the Court of Appeals are critically important to the parties involved.

“Let me also emphasize that the purpose of this historic change is not to lessen the burden on the Supreme Court. Rather, the intent is to free up the state’s highest court to devote more time and energy to the most complex and the most difficult cases that have the greatest implications for the law and society at large.”



## Open and transparent courts

- Our 21st century courts must be open, transparent, and accessible to all. Our citizens' confidence in their judicial system depends on it. We must be armed with qualified, certified interpreters, promote arbitration as an alternative to costly, courtroom-bound litigation, ensure that all those who cannot afford lawyers have an avenue toward justice, and be constantly updating technology with the aim of improving our courts' efficiency while saving literally millions of dollars.
- Our goal is to develop a uniform statewide electronic filing and retrieval system so that lawyers and others throughout the judiciary can file and access data the easiest way possible. Using a single portal, attorneys will be able to file documents with trial courts and appellate courts – and retrieve them from any court in the state.

As Georgia grows, it grows more diverse. Even for fluent English speakers, the judicial system can be confusing and unwelcoming.

“Chief Magistrate Kristina Blum of the Gwinnett County Magistrate Court has been working hard to ensure access to justice for all those who come to her court, most of whom are representing themselves.

“Recently her court created brochures that provide guidance for civil trials, family violence matters, warrant applications, garnishments, and landlord-tenant disputes. These brochures provide basic information.”

## Accountability Courts

Georgia now has 131 accountability courts, which include drug courts, DUI courts, juvenile and adult mental health courts, and Veterans courts. Today, only two judicial circuits in the state do not yet have a specialty court, and both are in the early stages of discussing the possibility of starting one.

“Chief Judge Richard Slaby of the Richmond County State Court, speaks with great pride of Judge David Watkins and the specialty courts that have grown under Judge Watkins' direction. Today the recidivism rate among the Augusta participants is less than 10 percent.”



Judge David Watkins

In closing, Chief Justice Thompson said, “I thank all of our leaders, and I thank all of our judges who are leading our courts into the 21st century.”

Read the full State of the Judiciary address at <http://bit.ly/2016SOJ>.

The Judicial Council and State Bar of Georgia hosted a reception for Legislators on January 27, 2016. Judges of the Judicial Council, Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, and others met with a number of legislators immediately following the State of the Judiciary Address.





On behalf of the Judicial Council and the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), I am pleased to present the 43rd annual report on our accomplishments during FY 2016. The AOC exists to serve the Judicial Council of Georgia, and that service is broad. Our charge from the Judicial Council's strategic plan is to improve justice in ALL Georgia courts, which we are striving to do through collaboration, innovation, and information. An important part of improving justice results from providing the best possible service to our courts. This year we made a three-minute explainer video which is on our website to begin to inform judges, lawyers, and the public about what the Judicial Council does and how the AOC supports it.

We create this annual report to take stock of our work for the fiscal year from July 2015 through June 2016. You will read about the programs established or improved to provide better service. Other highlights include the AOC staff being invited to support the Criminal Justice Reform Council, making room for the expansion of the Supreme Court of Georgia by consolidating all staff on one floor and hosting multiple livestream classes, including a December 2015 class on successful communications for a high profile case or a crisis.

Personally, I have been visiting our courts and attending Council meetings in an effort to get to know the judges and staff that we serve better; we have started a "Touch Every Court" initiative in which we ask our staff to fill out a survey regarding every court or judge visited. The information entered by staff then populates a map, which we use as a teaching tool to better understand the daily work of our state's courts.

While we have an obligation to serve all clients, and to work with our partners that also serve the judiciary, we have a duty to serve the public at large by providing information and institutional support so people can navigate and receive justice from Georgia's courts. Part of our mission to improve justice is to take on the hard problems. The courts have a special obligation to serve our most fragile citizens – children, victims of domestic violence, the poor, the elderly – which cannot always be done with ease. But we have a duty to keep trying and experimenting and taking risks that will lead to improvement. This type of thinking permeates all our staff's work and is reflective in all our work products. Justice Harold Clarke used to say: "Justice belongs to everyone, or it belongs to nobody at all."

Public service work has its own rewards because it is purpose driven work. Purpose has helped us attract new employees this past year, and I am privileged to be mentoring a new generation of dedicated, creative talent. We come to work every day, eager to take on hard problems. I am most optimistic about the future. I continue to thank you for this opportunity to serve the judges and the citizens of Georgia.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cynthia H. Clanton".

Cynthia H. Clanton  
Director  
Judicial Council/Administrative Office of the Courts



# *Judicial Council of Georgia*

Chief Justice Hugh P. Thompson  
Chair  
Supreme Court

Presiding Justice P. Harris Hines  
Vice Chair  
Supreme Court

Chief Judge Sara L. Doyle  
Court of Appeals

Judge Stephen L.A. Dillard  
Court of Appeals

Judge Horace J. Johnson  
Council of Superior Court Judges

Judge Tilman E. Self III  
Council of Superior Court Judges

Judge Richard A. Slaby  
Council of State Court Judges

Judge Gregory Fowler  
Council of State Court Judges

Judge Benjamin P. Brinson  
Council of Juvenile Court Judges

Judge James R. Whitfield  
Council of Juvenile Court Judges

Judge Alice W. Padgett  
Council of Probate Court Judges

Judge Rooney Bowen III  
Council of Probate Court Judges

Judge Kristina Hammer Blum  
Council of Magistrate Court Judges

Judge James M. Griner Jr.  
Council of Magistrate Court Judges

Judge Gary E. Jackson  
Council of Municipal Court Judges

Judge John A. Roberts  
Council of Municipal Court Judges

Patrick T. O'Connor  
President, State Bar of Georgia  
Ex Officio

District Administrative Judges

Judge Stephen G. Scarlett  
First District

Judge Stephen S. Goss  
Second District

Judge Arthur L. Smith III  
Third District

Judge Tangela M. Barrie  
Fourth District

Judge Gail S. Tusan  
Fifth District

Judge Brian J. Amero  
Sixth District

Judge Jack Partain  
Seventh District

Judge Donald W. Gillis  
Eighth District

Judge Melodie Snell Conner  
Ninth District

Judge Carl C. Brown  
Tenth District



***The Judicial Council Strategic Plan Implementation Committee met throughout FY 2016 to complete the objectives and initiatives of the Judicial Council's FY 2014 - 2016 Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan priority initiatives and their achievements are outlined below. A Strategic Plan Standing Committee was created in 2016 to develop and implement a strategic plan for FY 2017 - 2019.***

1. **Establish a baseline evaluation of current customer experience with Georgia courts, focusing on access and fairness measures.** The AOC surveyed 114 locations and analyzed 3,868 responses. The feedback received from this evaluation was positive overall. Specific results were shared with the participating courts. It was suggested that this survey be conducted statewide on a regular basis.
2. **Encourage Georgia courts to assess performance and develop improvement plans.** The AOC launched a statewide CourTools training initiative to encourage the use of performance measurements to enhance court performance. The initiative included outreach to judges' and clerks' councils to build awareness of CourTools, and culminated in the presentation of the full certification course to approximately 40 court professionals in November 2014. The Judicial Council Workload Assessment Committee drafted new Georgia Model Time Standards that were circulated within all classes of courts. These Standards serve as voluntary goals for courts to use in setting their caseload management strategies.
3. **Implement ongoing strategic planning by the Judicial Council and AOC.** The new Judicial Council bylaws, adopted in June 2015, require the Council to engage in ongoing strategic planning. A new Strategic Plan Standing Committee was appointed on January 6, 2016, and has begun developing a new strategic plan for FY 2017 - 2019 to ensure the accomplishment of this directive.

"I look  
*forward*  
to the opportunity to  
*build*  
on the work already done  
through Judge Doyle's  
*leadership*  
— Judge Allen Wigington





4. **Implement new approaches to engage the Judicial Council for legislative sessions.**

The Judicial Council's Policy and Legislative Committee instituted a white paper process whereby each class of court reviews proposed legislation and recommends whether or not it should be supported, opposed, or no position taken. The AOC monitors legislation, produces a legislative update, and keeps the judiciary informed during the legislative session. A designated legislative liaison for the Judicial Council/AOC serves as the point person with legislators, lobbyists, and the Governor's office.

5. **Develop and implement new two-way communication strategies for Judicial Council/AOC to engage with judges.**

New strategies to improve communications have been implemented including: 1) providing simulcasts of educational information for judges; 2) transmitting all publications electronically while still providing judges with printed copies, upon their request; 3) simplifying our website to ensure access to relevant information; 4) training AOC staff to communicate more effectively with judicial clients throughout Georgia on the agency's services; and 5) communicating innovative and interesting information to the judiciary on a timely basis.

What is the Judicial Council of Georgia?



As part of the new communications strategies, a Judicial Council explainer video was developed for new members. <https://vimeo.com/179183886>

6. **Solicit input and develop recommendations for Judicial Council bylaws, committee structure, and leadership continuity.**

The Judicial Council adopted its inaugural bylaws in June 2015. Several Judicial Council committees have recently been modified to standardize committee membership and terms and to memorialize the mission of each committee.

7. **Define research priorities and schedule for FY 2014, FY 2015, and FY 2016.**

Research priorities were defined and included ongoing trial and accountability court caseload reporting, Office of Dispute Resolution statistics, child support problem-solving court evaluations, and ongoing surveys. The AOC Research Office is also collecting information on *pro se* litigants and litigants with limited English proficiency.

8. **Create an open repository of information for all classes of court.**

Surveys were distributed to determine how to create a repository. The AOC has developed an intranet log-in portal to provide judicial clients with access to resources and materials. The intranet will soon be made available to the Judicial Council, its committees, and interested court councils.

9. **Identify and share innovations and best practices across Georgia's courts.**

Surveys were distributed to determine what types of information the judiciary routinely requests. The AOC has held educational sessions for judges on various best practices.

***As the judicial branch's policy-making body for statewide issues, the Judicial Council considers new judgeships, budgetary and legislative matters, and judicial branch programs and policies.***

Chaired by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Judicial Council's membership represents all of Georgia's appellate and trial courts. The Council also oversees the work of the Administrative Office of the Courts, which staffs the Council and its committees.

The Judicial Council met five times during FY 2016 and took the following actions:

- Hired Ms. Cynthia Clanton as the Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts;
- Approved a recommendation for an additional judge in the Clayton Judicial Circuit.

On May 5, 2016, the Supreme Court of Georgia adopted an order to expand the Judicial Council to include the President of the State Bar of Georgia as a non-voting member. The new order expands the membership of the Council from 26 to 27 members.



Above: Judges listen to a presentation at the December 2015 Judicial Council meeting.



Middle: At the August 2015 meeting, Chief Justice Hugh Thompson swears in new Judicial Council members Judge Benjamin Brinson, Judge Melodie Snell Conner, Judge Richard Slaby, Judge Stephen Dillard, and Judge Gary Jackson.



Bottom: At the February 2016 meeting, Judge John B. Sumner reports on the work of the Council of Juvenile Court Judges.

***The General Assembly met from January 11 until March 24, 2016. Legislation significant to the judicial branch included garnishment reform, two additional justices for the Supreme Court, and appellate jurisdiction reform.***

Four Judicial Council bills passed during the 2016 session, H.B. 691, S.B. 64, S.B. 255, and S.B. 262.

- H.B. 691 amends O.C.G.A. § 36-32-1 to provide removal for cause provisions for municipal court judges and procedures for removal proceedings.
- S.B. 64 repeals O.C.G.A. § 19-7-21.1, the Code Section that provides for administrative legitimation.
- S.B. 255 amends Chapter 4 of Title 18 of the O.C.G.A. to restructure the garnishment statutes and provide for garnishment reform.
- S.B. 262 changes the degree of consanguinity between judges and parties who appear before them from six degrees to three. The bill absorbed HB 1027, which provides that by court rule or standing order any superior court or state court may accept electronic filings and may accept payments and remittances by electronic means. In addition, it clarifies provisions related to the filing of documents by electronic means in magistrate court.

Additionally, two new justices for the Supreme Court of Georgia and one superior court judgeship in the Clayton Judicial Circuit were authorized.







Cynthia Clanton, JC/AOC Director, Justice Harold Melton, and Ashley Garner, JC/AOC Chief Budget Officer, present the Judicial Council Budget on February 22, 2016.

During the 2016 Legislative session, \$126,643,493 was appropriated to the Judicial Branch for FY 2017. Funding was received for the Cold Case Program, the Georgia Council of Court Administrators, civil legal services for victims of domestic violence, and for the Institute of Continuing Judicial Education to support operations and technology infrastructure, and licensing for services provided to multiple classes of court. Adjustments were funded for merit-based pay adjustments and employee recruitment and retention initiatives, merit assessments, increases to the Employees' Retirement System contribution rate to provide a one-time benefit adjustment of 3% to retired state employees. Adjustments were also received to reduce funds for DOAS administered self-insurance programs, TeamWorks billing, and employer contributions for the Judicial Retirement System.

The Amended FY 2016 budget included a reduction in funds for personnel to meet projected expenditures and an increase in funds for the employer share of the Employees' Retirement System for the Council of State Court Judges as well as for TeamWorks to comply with the new IRS reporting requirements on insurers and employers required by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA).

## Five Year Budget Comparison FY 2013 - FY 2017

	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017
Supreme Court	\$9,093,297	\$9,392,560	\$10,248,025	\$10,312,655	\$12,002,660
Court of Appeals	\$14,106,000	\$14,441,605	\$15,035,519	\$17,314,958	\$20,388,803
Superior Courts	\$61,105,042	\$62,255,828	\$64,909,147	\$65,136,540	\$71,957,668
Juvenile Courts	\$6,774,461	\$6,787,786	\$7,029,264	\$7,606,988	\$7,542,544
Judicial Council	\$12,423,861	\$12,322,112	\$13,461,113	\$15,411,761	\$14,751,818
Judicial Branch/Courts					
Total	\$103,502,661	\$105,199,891	\$110,683,068	\$115,782,902	\$126,643,493
State Funds	\$19,342,059,819	\$19,920,261,481	\$20,836,744,620	\$21,828,789,407	\$23,739,270,238
% of State Funds	0.54%	0.53%	0.53%	0.53%	0.53%
% of State Funds Change	-0.02%	-0.01%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

## Amended FY 2016 Budget

Amended FY 2016 Enhancement Request	Amount Requested	Amount Funded
Institute of Continuing Judicial Education	\$13,000	\$0

Adjustments		
Council of Accountability Court Judges	Change program name	Yes
Council of Accountability Court Judges	Change program purpose	Yes
Administrative Office of the Courts	Change program purpose	Yes
Council of State Court Judges ERS	\$44,687	\$44,687
Council of State Court Judges JRS	\$54,617	\$54,617
Reduce funds for personnel		\$(113,642)
TeamWorks billing		\$1,049

## FY 2017 Budget

FY 2017 Enhancement Request	Amount Requested	Amount Funded
Civil Legal Services for Victims of Domestic Violence	\$193,125	\$193,125
Cold Case Project	\$75,000	\$75,000
Council of Municipal Court Judges	\$21,795	\$0
Council of Probate Court Judges	\$40,000	\$0
Georgia Council of Court Administrators	\$7,500	\$7,500
Council of Municipal Court Judges	\$21,795	\$0
Institute of Continuing Judicial Education	\$123,718	\$24,000
Parental Accountability Court Coordinators	\$247,267	Funded. DHS budget

Adjustments		
Administrative Office of the Courts	Change program purpose	Yes
Council of Accountability Court Judges	Change program name	Yes
Council of Accountability Court Judges	Change program purpose	Yes
Council of Accountability Court Judges	Transfer from CJCC	\$156,631
Department of Administrative Services	Self insurance premiums	\$(27,510)
E-Filing Portal	One-time reduction	\$(96,000)
Employees Retirement System	3% one-time benefit	\$4,469
Judicial Retirement System	Change in program rate	\$(199,470)
Merit based pay adjustment		\$185,310
Merit system assessment	Change in program rate	\$1,932
TeamWorks billing		\$(582)

***The Judicial Council/AOC provides subject-matter expertise on policy, court innovation, legislation, and court administration to all classes of courts. The agency also furnishes a full range of information technology, budget, and financial services to the judicial branch.***

Director Clanton represents the interests of the Judicial Council and courts on several state bodies including the Institute of Continuing Judicial Education (ICJE) as a Trustee and the Board of Court Reporting as Secretary. She is an appointee to the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and several of their committees. Cynthia continues to maintain her strong ties with the State Bar of Georgia by serving as advisor to the Bench and Bar Committee and member of the Consumer Assistance Committee.

#### **Office of General Counsel**

The Office of General Counsel drafted a record 218 contracts, including contracts for the Tax Refund Intercept Program (TRIP) and the Civil Legal Services Grant, which appropriates \$2.2 million in grant funds for nonprofits providing civil legal services to domestic violence victims. Over 7,000 domestic violence victims throughout Georgia received services under this grant. The Office of General Counsel conducted legal research pertaining to state bond funding for the creation of a statewide judicial data exchange program. In addition, the Office of General Counsel investigated disciplinary complaints against licensed court professionals.

#### **Office of Governmental and Trial Court Liaison**

In FY 2016, the Governmental and Trial Court Liaison (GTCL) team focused on providing the highest level of service to the trial court councils, collaborating and coordinating with judicial branch stakeholders, and supporting the Judicial Council in its strategic goals and mission.

In its liaison function, staff provided policy and technical support and/or administrative services to the following groups: the Council of Municipal Court Judges (CMuCJ) and the Municipal Courts Training Council; the Magistrate Courts Training Council; the Council of Magistrate Court Clerks; and the Council of Municipal Court Clerks. Staff provided support at Council training conferences, leadership meetings and numerous committee meetings over the course of the year. Additionally, as staff to the Magistrate and Municipal Courts Training Councils, GTCL staff worked closely with the Institute of Continuing Judicial Education and continued annual certification processes. This included the transition to the Georgia Courts Registrar for maintenance of continuing education records and certification. Staff also provided legal research services and policy analysis to trial court councils as requested.

Notable activities from FY 2016 included the support of the CMuCJ's District Lunch and Learn series and facilitating the collaboration between the CMuCJ and AOC Office of Communications on the development of a Crisis Media Guidelines Benchcard. GTCL staff also managed the development of a Misdemeanor Probation Bench Card, in partnership with Judge Michael Boggs and the Criminal Justice Policy Program at Harvard Law School.

In its legislative function, the GTCL team supported requests for the Judicial Council Policy and Legislative Committee to consider legislation for all classes of court and make recommendations to the Judicial Council. Legislative services included governmental affairs



liaison, legislative tracking, daily and weekly legislative reports, and coordination with Council leadership and staff in pursuit of legislative goals. Staff worked closely with the appellate courts on S.B. 262, relating to consanguinity between judges and parties to a case, and the CMuCJ on H.B. 691, providing removal for cause provisions for municipal court judges.

## ***The Financial Administration Division processed all financial transactions for 17 judicial agencies during FY 2016.***

A total of 102 programs were maintained over FY 2016, including 34 state, 10 federal, and 58 other funded programs.

All programs are continuously monitored for budgetary compliance and available for the annual independent inspection and audit.

During the 2016 tax season, nine pilot courts participated in the Tax Refund Intercept Program pilot. The courts submitted electronic intercept requests to the clearinghouse. Two hundred and five intercepts were made. Intercept requests averaged \$630 and successful intercepts averaged \$200. Nearly \$40,000 was collected by the Department of Revenue from court debtors during the 2016 tax season.



JC/AOC staff traveled across the state in preparation of TRIP's launch in 2016. Above, Mike Cuccaro, left, and Randy Dennis, right, meet with staff from the Municipal Court of Marietta.



Staff of the JC/AOC.

## ***The Communications, Children, Families and the Courts Division is new as of FY 2016. The Division now serves as the hub for all communications and provides staff to numerous Committees and Commissions.***

This division provides staff for the Supreme Court of Georgia Committee on Justice for Children, chaired by Presiding Justice P. Harris Hines; the Georgia Commission on Child Support, chaired by Judge R. Michael Key; and the Access, Fairness, Public Trust and Confidence Committee of the Judicial Council, co-chaired by Justice Robert Benham and Justice Carol Hunstein, as well as any grant funded work related to children and families. Researching grants for all courts is also a service provided within this division and one new grant — a State Justice Institute grant — was sought and received in 2016.

In addition, this Division also serves as liaison to the Georgia Commission on Family Violence (GCFV), chaired by Holly Tuchman, and the Council of Accountability Court Judges (CACJ), with Judge Jason Deal as its current President.

### **Committee on Justice for Children (J4C)**

Since 1995, the Supreme Court of Georgia has received the Court Improvement grant to focus on improving the process of civil child abuse and neglect cases. The Committee on Justice for Children was created by Supreme Court order and is currently chaired



Presiding Justice P. Harris Hines, left, Supreme Court of Georgia, Chairs the Committee on Justice for Children; Judge Michael Boggs, Court of Appeals, and Rep. Wendell Willard at a J4C meeting, top; Bobby Cagle, DFCS Director, Debra Nesbit, ACCG, and Tee Barnes, Clerk, Supreme Court of Georgia, below.

by Presiding Justice P. Harris Hines. The Committee's mandate is to guide the administration of three federal grants totaling close to \$800,000 per year. Mostly recently, the Cold Case Project (a project utilizing statistical predictive modeling to designate foster children's cases which appear to be heading for a negative outcome, and having those cases reviewed and monitored by attorney specialists) has become institutionalized with state appropriations. This was achieved by being able to show five years' worth of positive project data on both child outcomes and costs. Other work under the J4C for FY 2016 includes the Court Process Reporting System (real time child specific data exchanged between the juvenile

courts and the Division of Family and Children Services); Juvenile Court Improvement Team bi-annual meetings; Peer Review Observations and trainings; sponsorship of Georgia attorneys and judges to become Child Welfare Law Specialists (51 to date) and sponsoring or partnering to provide multiple legal educational opportunities. Committee information and annual reports, including the annual report specific to the Cold Case Project, are available online at [j4c.georgiacourts.gov](http://j4c.georgiacourts.gov).



In February 2016, the Judicial Council/AOC celebrated the pioneering African American judges of Georgia and in March 2016, pioneering Women judges were celebrated.

of press releases; updating Judicial Council materials, providing substantive content for Facebook/Twitter and georgiacourts.gov; taking photos; and drafting daily messages for events and communications.

Special projects include sponsoring a Day on the Bench in the Augusta Judicial Circuit, creating an explainer video about the Judicial Council of Georgia, and profiling and live-streaming multiple events where judges of the Judicial Council and the committees of this division participate in a variety of panels, speeches, and projects to improve justice. See: <https://livestream.com/accounts/15641258> for a sampling of this work.

## Communications

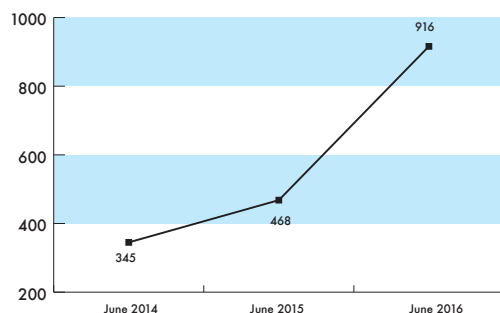
Improving communications for internal and external judicial branch audiences was and is a priority under the Judicial Council Strategic Plan. The work within Communications serves to (1) improve justice by providing information of the actions and work of the Judicial Council of Georgia; (2) raise awareness of the daily work of judges and court administration stakeholders with the JC/AOC; and (3) equip and engage Judicial Council members and JC/AOC employees as effective communicators.

In FY 2016, a communication plan was approved by the Strategic Planning Committee and implementation was underway. Periodic tasks within Communications include writing and publishing the JC/AOC Annual Report; the quarterly *Georgia Courts Journal*; updating and publishing the *Georgia Courts Directory* (which is being automated); assisting with drafting and distribution

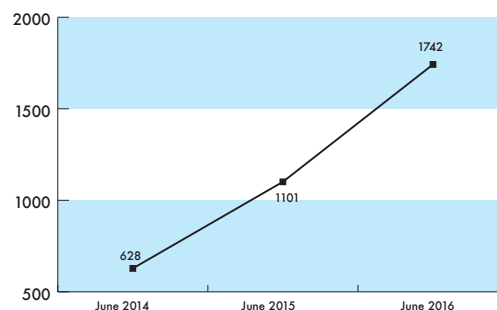
## JC/AOC ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The Judicial Council/AOC Facebook and Twitter accounts were created in August 2011. These accounts are used as a conduit to reach out to judges, news outlets, and the general public regarding the work of the courts and the Judicial Council/AOC. Over five years, both accounts have risen in readership and usage, especially during the past two years.

Facebook Likes @GACourts June 2014 thru June 2016



Twitter Followers @GACourts June 2014 thru June 2016





## Child Support Commission

The Child Support Commission sponsored its first ever statewide Child Support Conference in November 2015. Commission staff worked with a vendor to finalize and publicly release a new online child support calculator. The Commission appointed a subcommittee on Gender Neutrality to address some of the issues that arose due to the *Obergefell*



Child Support Collaborative Project Director Patricia Buondono teaches a session on Deviations and Split & Shared Parenting at the November Child Support Conference.

decision, such as how best to identify the parties on the child support worksheets that are presently designated simply as “mother” and “father.” The Commission successfully sought legislation repealing administrative legitimization. Staff works collaboratively with DHS on the Parental Accountability Courts, training court coordinators on use of the database that will provide statistical evidence of the efficacy of those courts. Staff also provides training throughout the state on child support, income deduction, and other related subjects, and responds daily to questions from judges, attorneys and the public.

The Commission’s work recently has focused on training for the online child support calculator along with user manuals, and preparing for the November 2016 Child Support Conference in Columbus, Georgia. See: [csc.georgiacourts.gov](http://csc.georgiacourts.gov).

## Access, Fairness, and Public Trust and Confidence Committee (AFPTCC)

With staff changes in FY 2016, contract attorney Karlise Grier was engaged to staff the work of this Committee. During FY 2016 and under a revised Supreme Court order, the Committee has held three meetings, is near completion of a Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Handbook for the Georgia courts, submitted a proposal to the State Justice Institute which was granted to host a Human Trafficking and the Courts summit and has started collaboration between the Council of Municipal Court Judges, the Institute of Continuing Judicial Education, and AFPTCC on a series of classes and articles entitled “Georgia Reflections on Ferguson – The Role of the Courts.” Judge LaTisha Dear-Jackson and Judge Leslie Spornberger Jones have provided leadership for the project. A summit on this topic has been scheduled for December 15, 2016.

See: [afptc.georgiacourts.gov](http://afptc.georgiacourts.gov).



Top photo: Justice Robert Benham and Justice Carol W. Hunstein co-chair the Access, Fairness and Public Trust and Confidence Committee. Bottom photo: Judge Cassandra Kirk, Chief Magistrate, Fulton County, and Coy Johnson, Jr., review “A Meaningful Opportunity to Participate: A Handbook for Georgia Court Officials on Courtroom Accessibility for Individuals with Disabilities” at a meeting in May 2016.

## Family Violence Grants

In addition to serving as liaison to the GCFV, the staff in this division manages grants related to family violence including those provided by the Federal Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) and Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). The OVW grant supports the DeKalb County Domestic Violence Court by supporting the costs of its coordinator and two legal advocates. The CJCC grant supports domestic violence courts throughout the state with training and follow up visits.

This division has taken over the administration of the state funded civil legal services grants for victims of domestic violence, sharing tasks with the Director's Division.

### Civil Legal Services to Victims of Family Violence Grant Awards for FY 2016

<i>Atlanta Legal Aid Society</i>	<i>\$642,921</i>
<i>Cherokee Family Violence Center, Inc.</i>	<i>\$5,700</i>
<i>GA Law Center for the Homeless</i>	<i>\$25,000</i>
<i>Gateway House</i>	<i>\$6,120</i>
<i>GA Legal Services Program</i>	<i>\$1,499,496</i>
<i>Northwest GA Family Crisis Ctr, Inc.</i>	<i>\$33,000</i>
<i>Support in Abusive Family Emergencies</i>	<i>\$35,000</i>
<i>Wayne County Protective Agency</i>	<i>\$13,500</i>
<b>TOTAL FUNDS AWARDED</b>	<b>\$2,260,737</b>

*Nearly 7,000 low-income Georgia victims were served by a variety of legal services, such as obtaining protective orders from the courts, to help protect their safety using these grants.*

## ***The Judicial Council/AOC Information Technology (IT) Division made transitions and upgrades during FY 2016 to improve the quality and stability of services provided to Georgia's judicial stakeholders.***

In support of the strategic planning efforts underway for the Judicial Council, the IT Division has invested energy to ensure that services and products provided align with the Strategic Plan. This report reviews the previous plan for 2014 – 2016, and sets a course for 2017 and beyond.

### *Judicial Council Standing Committee on Technology*

- Created September 3, 2015, by the Supreme Court of Georgia.
- Per the order, the Committee shall provide guidance and oversight of the Judicial Council's technology initiatives.
- Membership is comprised of twenty participants and chaired by Justice Harold D. Melton; Judge David T. Emerson serves as Vice Chair. The membership represents judges, clerks, JC/AOC, members of the bar, and court administrators, with designees from the Governor's Office, Attorney General's Office, Senate and House of Representatives.



Jorge Basto, JC/AOC IT Division Director; Judge David Emerson, and Justice Harold Melton at a meeting in May 2016.

- Meetings began in January 2016 and are scheduled for every 60 days.
- Topics covered included a statewide customer portal, data exchange projects, and single sign on capabilities.

### *Microsoft Office 365 Email Migration*

- JC/AOC email services were migrated to a cloud environment.
- Employees may access their email, calendars, and contacts, as well as office productivity applications from any device.

### *Network Infrastructure upgrade at both the primary and secondary datacenters.*

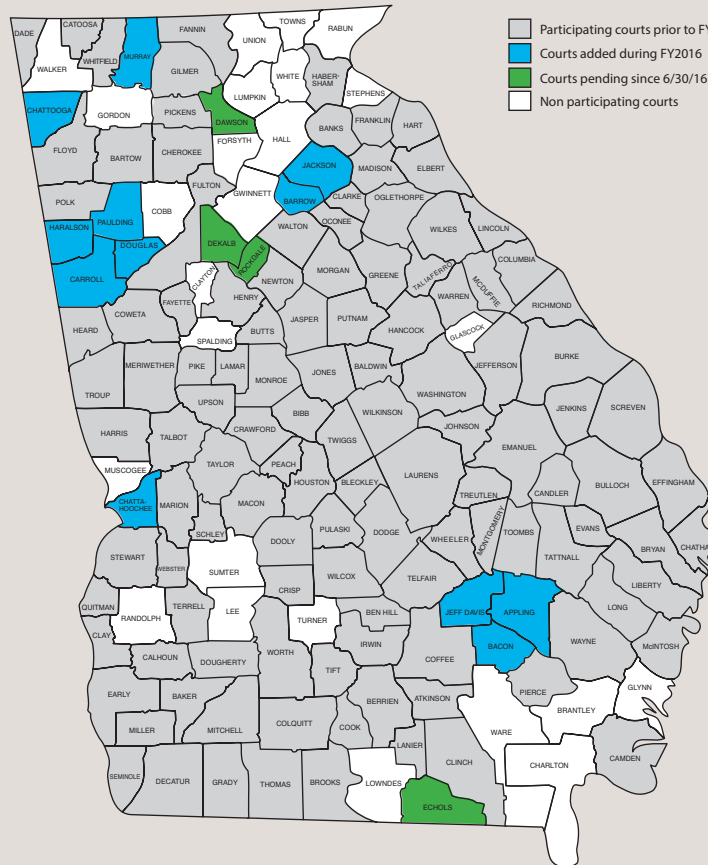
- Increased capacity and infrastructure to support bandwidth intensive applications.
- Increased storage capacity.
- Replaced aging legacy servers to reduce costs, increase efficiency, and improve service levels.



## Georgia Judicial Exchange (GAJE)

- 12 new counties began accepting child support cases electronically into their Superior Court case management system.
- 130 Counties in total were participating in the program as of June 30, 2016.
- 45 Child Support Offices electronically filed cases into Superior Courts.
- 34,965 child support filings were electronically transmitted.

For additional information, visit the project website at: [GAJE.georgiacourts.gov](http://GAJE.georgiacourts.gov)



## Probate Court Information System (PCIS) v2

- Now a web application requiring internet connectivity and little to no overhead.
- Available at no cost to any probate court.
- Version 2 provides court clients with a fully-hosted system in a secure infrastructure.
- Added and enhanced features and functionality to handle all manner of responsibilities of the probate courts:

Estate proceedings, guardianships,

Marriage, firearms, other licenses, and certificates,

Court calendars, electronic document importing and scanning,

Enhanced printing of all required reports and certificates,

Electronic reminders and notifications,

Electronically transmits marriage data via GAVERS to the Department of Public Health, Vital Records Division,

Integration with PASP, the state's firearms license card provider,

Accurately accounts for fee collections and receipting,

Automatically calculates proper disbursements to the appropriate parties.

## *Juvenile Data Exchange (JDEX)*

- The Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), in cooperation with the Council of Juvenile Court Judges, has sponsored a project to combine disparate sets of juvenile data into a consolidated data repository.
- The Judicial Council/AOC is the data repository selected for this project and provides subject matter expertise on data collection and management. The Judicial Council/AOC provides services for reports and interactive dashboards to the constituents and stakeholders under their direction.
- Phase I, which ran from June 2015 until February 2016, included capturing demographic data on youth from DJJ supported courts as well as independent courts around Georgia. The goal of two years of data has been met and currently includes demographic and risk assessments for nearly 50,000 juveniles from around the state.
- Juvenile data is protected through user-based security access, as well as industry best practices of two step verification.
- Individual identifiers have been removed, where feasible, to allow for data driven decision making by justice partners and stakeholders.
- Phase II is underway and includes piloting reports to juvenile courts, expanding data collection to offense and legal actions, and placement histories for juveniles.



Attorney Jerry Bruce explains JDEX to the Judicial Council on August 6, 2015.

For additional information, visit the project website at [jdex.georgiacourts.gov/](http://jdex.georgiacourts.gov/)

*The AOC's Judicial Services Division provides valuable services to Georgia's judicial branch. Through its two offices, Research and Data Analysis and Court Professionals, the Division delivers data-driven analysis of the state's trial courts and oversees the policy and regulatory matters of Georgia's court professionals.*

## RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

The Office of Research and Data Analysis (Research Office) has served Georgia's judiciary for forty years by examining the work of all the state's trial courts. Data is furnished to the Judicial Council/AOC by Georgia's over 1,000 courts and used to provide insight into Judicial Council policy and budget initiatives, support state and county resource decisions, including recommendations for new judgeships, and to assist judicial, legislative, and executive branches to understand the work of Georgia's courts. More recently, the Research Office has undertaken collecting demographic data on a variety of court professionals, including judges, court reporters, and court interpreters. All these data are presented with the goal of providing a brief snapshot into the people behind Georgia's judicial branch and the work they have accomplished.

### Trial Court Caseload\*

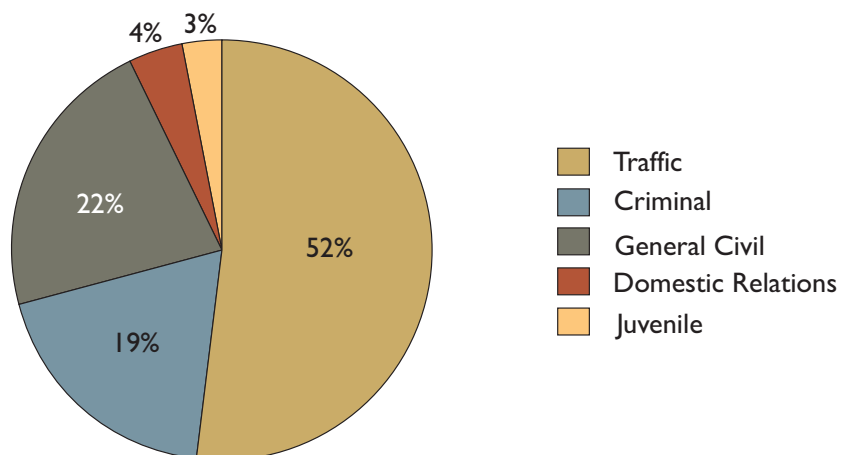
In 2015, Georgia courts received over three million incoming cases. Of that three million, 89% of the filings were generated by the limited jurisdiction courts (state, juvenile, probate, magistrate, and municipal courts). The largest portion of cases filed in 2015 were traffic cases, which comprised 52% of the caseload. The municipal courts provided the largest number of incoming cases at 38% of the total caseload.

*Total Filings by Case Type and Jurisdiction, CY 2015*

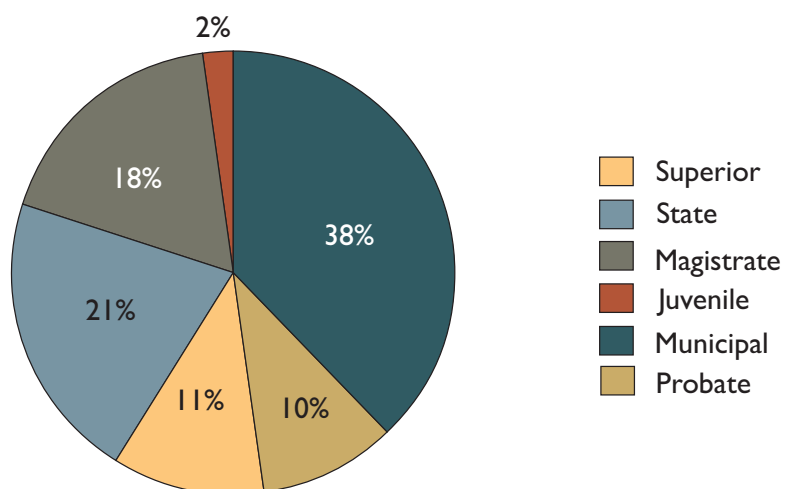
Case Type	Jurisdiction		
	Limited	General	Total
Traffic	1,728,664	-	1,728,664
Criminal	456,136	172,175	628,311
General Civil	677,790	48,242	726,032
Domestic Relations	-	145,786	145,786
Juvenile	81,256	-	81,256
Total Incoming	2,943,846	366,203	3,310,049
Percent of Total	89%	11%	100%

\*Data are accurate as of the date retrieved and may not match previous or future publications due to additional reports and/or corrections to previous reporting. Only courts that self-reported data are included in these figures. This report likely underestimates Georgia's total caseload. Reporting levels vary by class of court.

Total Filings by Case Type



Percent of Total Filings within Each Class of Court

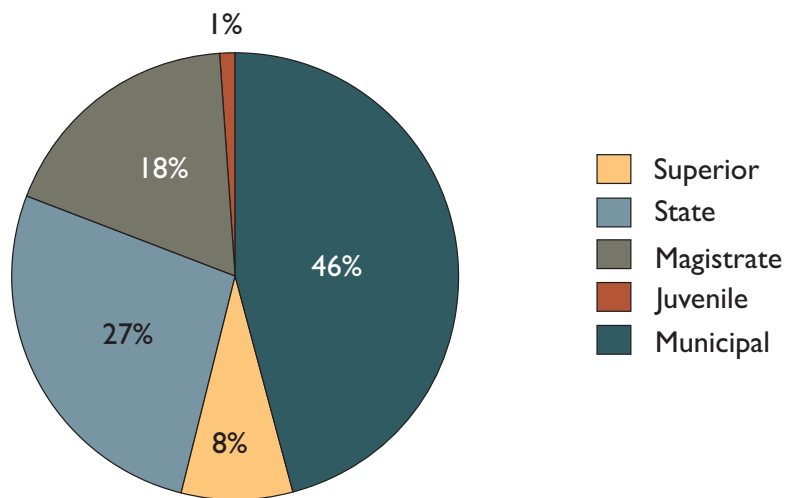




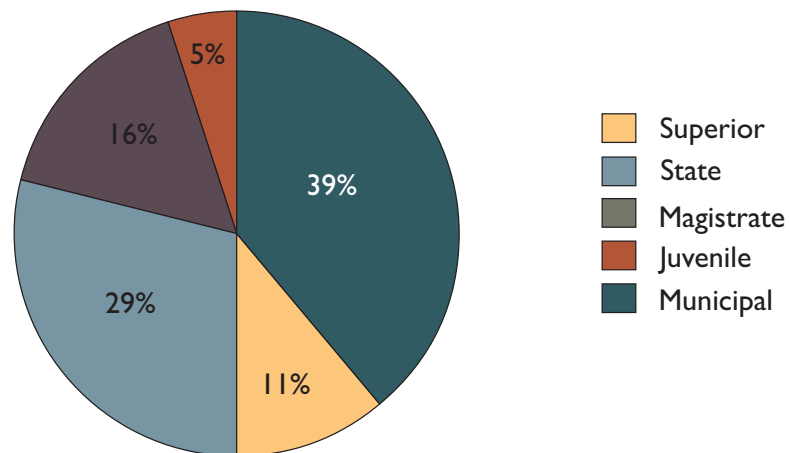
### *Cases with Special Characteristics*

Over CY 2015, Georgia courts saw a rise in cases involving self-represented litigants and parties with limited English proficiency. In total, the courts heard 882,141 cases involving self-represented litigants and 16,307 cases involving persons with limited English proficiency. In both instances, the municipal courts provided the greatest number of cases for each category.

**Percent Share of Cases with Self-Represented Litigants**



**Percent Share of Cases with Limited English Proficient Participants**



## Projects

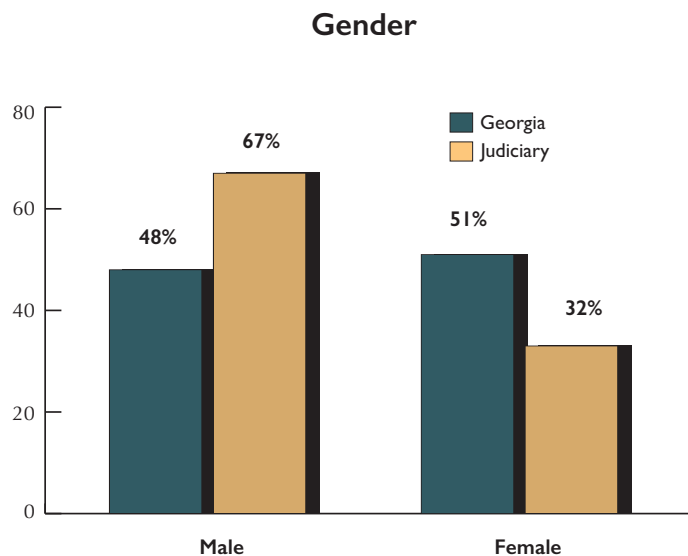
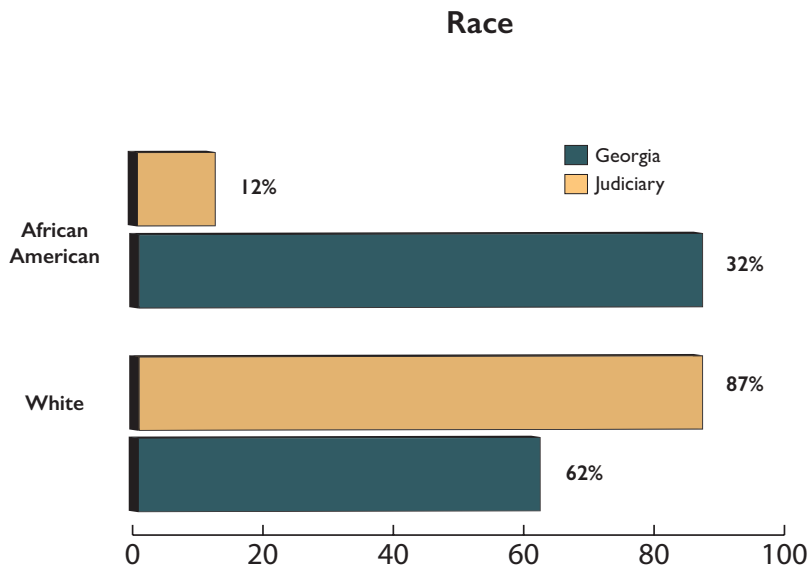
In 2015, the Research Office worked with the Council of Probate Judges to update the probate court's caseload reporting form. This new form will allow the JC/AOC to capture a comprehensive picture of the probate courts' workload. The new form will be used to report 2016 data.

## Accountability Courts

The Research Office assisted the Council of Accountability Court Judges with improving their Accountability Court Program Report for FY 2017. The Office also assisted with training court coordinators to do quarterly program reporting and serves on CACJ's Subcommittee on Metrics and Measurement. As part of this Subcommittee, the Research Office is responsible for proposing data analysis methods that will be implemented and published at the end of the FY 2017 reporting period and beyond.

## Demographics

Demographic comparisons between Georgia's total population and its judicial population are illustrated below.



# Judicial Demographics<sup>†</sup>

## Supreme Court

7 Justices

4 judges White Male  
2 judges Black Male  
1 judge White Female

## Court of Appeals

15 Judges

8 judges White Male  
4 judges White Female  
1 judge Black Male  
1 judge Black Female  
1 judge Asian Female

## Superior Court

212 judges

151 judges White Male  
31 judges White Female  
11 judges Black Female  
9 judges Black Male  
1 judge Asian Male  
9 judges Unknown\*

## State Court

127 judges

86 judges White Male  
24 judges White Female  
7 judges Black Male  
7 judges Black Female  
1 judge Asian Male  
1 judge Native American Male  
1 judge Unknown\*

## Juvenile Court

132 judges

71 judges White Male  
29 judges White Female  
8 judges Black Male  
7 judges Black Female  
1 judge Asian Male  
16 judges Unknown\*

## Probate Court

159 judges, 11 associate judges

74 judges White Male  
85 judges White Female  
4 judges Black Male  
5 judges Black Female  
2 judges Unknown\*

## Magistrate Court

504 judges

235 judges White Male  
158 judges White Female  
40 judges Black Female  
27 judges Black Male  
2 judges Asian Female  
2 judges Native American Male  
1 judge Native American Female  
1 judge Two or More Races Male  
4 judges Other  
34 judges Unknown\*

## Municipal Court, Civil, & Recorders Court

365 judges

258 judges White Male  
32 judges White Female  
26 judges Black Male  
18 judges Black Female  
2 judges Asian Male  
1 judge Two or More Races Female  
1 judge Two or More Races Male  
1 judge Native American Male  
26 judges Unknown\*

<sup>†</sup> Data is self-reported by judges. Information was retrieved on November 14, 2016.

\*One or more characteristic was unavailable to the JC/AOC to determine a demographic category.

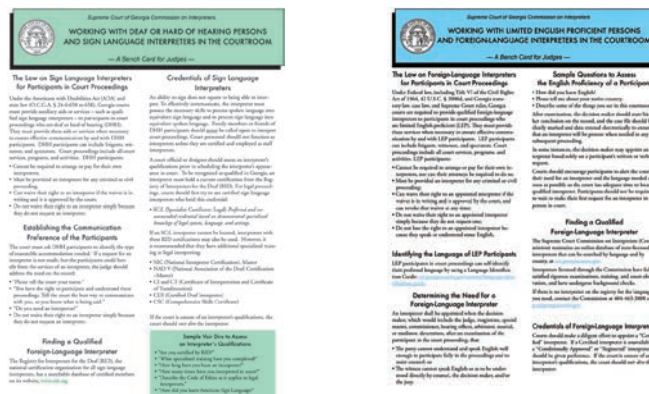
## OFFICE OF COURT PROFESSIONALS

The Office of Court Professionals is made up of two teams: the Georgia Courts Registrar team, tasked with the day-to-day processing of court professionals' applications, testing, certification, and continuing education, and the Policy and Regulatory team assigned to staff judicial branch regulatory bodies, including the Supreme Court Commission on Interpreters, the Judicial Council's Board of Court Reporting, and the Georgia Certified Process Server Program.

### Commission on Interpreters

The Commission on Interpreters is the policy-making and regulatory body appointed by the Supreme Court of Georgia to oversee court interpreters. Created in 2003 and currently chaired by Justice Keith Blackwell, the Commission is composed of judges, lawyers, non-lawyers, legislators, court administrators, and interpreters. The mission is to regulate a statewide comprehensive court interpreter program; develop criteria for the training and certification of interpreters; designate languages for which certification shall be required; and establish standards of conduct for interpreters so they can ensure the rights of non-English speaking and deaf or hard of hearing persons in court. In accordance with Chief Justice Thompson's State of the Judiciary vision that every court be able to serve all litigants speaking any language, the Commission completed the following during the fiscal year:

- Bench cards – Created quick-reference bench cards for working with both foreign



language interpreters and sign-language interpreters. These cards provide judges with information needed to ensure that court users who are limited English proficient, who are deaf, or who are hard of hearing are treated in accordance with federal and state law. The Commission distributed these cards to judicial, legislative, and executive branch stakeholders at the state and local level.

- Forms Translation – The Commission assisted Georgia's trial court councils with translating critical court forms into Spanish.
- Licensure – Licensed 22 more court interpreters to work in Georgia. There are now 159 licensed court interpreters in 11 spoken languages throughout the state.
- Education and Training – Provided education and training to both the Georgia Council of Court Administrators and the Georgia Municipal Association.



## **Board of Court Reporting**

The Board of Court Reporting ensures the integrity and competency of court reporters; establishes and enforces standards that govern court reporters; and provides a forum for an exchange of ideas and educational services. The Board completed the following during the fiscal year:

- Licensure – Trained 29 new court reporters through the Learning Essential About Professionalism Conference. There are now 994 court reporters and 101 court reporting firms certified in Georgia.
- Digital Monitor – Licensed the first member of a new category of court professionals, called digital monitors. They receive training and national certification to record proceedings through courtroom digital recording equipment and to produce official transcripts from the recordings. National certification is achieved by passing tests provided by the American Association of Electronic Reporters and Transcribers.
- Guide to Producing the Official Record – Produced with the Judicial Council Court Reporting Matters Committee as a resource for Georgia judges to be used when creating and preserving a true and accurate record of court proceedings. It contains policies formally adopted by the Judicial Council and references and links to statutory and case law regarding court reporting.

## **Process Servers**

The Georgia Certified Process Server Program seeks to advance professionalism and establish opportunities for growth within the process server industry. The Judicial Council governs the program, and the AOC administers an examination to persons seeking certification to serve civil process under the program. Since program inception, 514 people have tested.

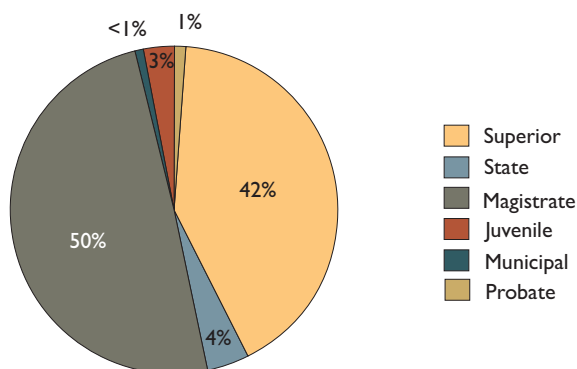
## **The Georgia Commission on Dispute Resolution is a policy-making body appointed by the Supreme Court of Georgia charged with the following duties:**

- administer a statewide comprehensive Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) program;
- oversee the development and ensure the quality of all court programs;
- approve court programs;
- develop guidelines for court ADR programs;
- develop criteria for training and qualifications of neutrals; and
- establish and enforce standards of conduct for neutrals.

The Commission, supported by the Georgia Office of Dispute Resolution, has created a state-wide plan for ADR in Georgia. This plan enables any superior, state, juvenile, probate, or magistrate court in Georgia to offer litigants alternatives to traditional litigation. Those alternatives – mediation, non-binding arbitration, and case evaluation – give litigants lower-cost choices for resolving their differences compared to going to trial, and they help conserve scarce court resources for high-conflict cases.

Caseload data collected from 22 of the 44 programs in 2015 shows the overall case settlement rate at 69%. The highest reported clearance rate was in magistrate court cases at 72%. Settlement of these cases through an alternative process such as mediation saves the court valuable financial and human resources.

To conduct an ADR session in a court program,



“Mediation  
*resolves*  
a significant  
portion of  
*court*  
*disputes,*  
and the  
*benefit*  
is immeasurable.”

— Judge Charles Auslander

**Alternative Dispute Resolution  
Referred Cases by Class of  
Court**

neutrals must be registered in the appropriate category with the Georgia Office of Dispute Resolution. Categories for registration include general civil mediation, domestic relations mediation, specialized domestic violence, arbitration, early neutral evaluation, juvenile dependency and juvenile delinquency. In 2015, there were 387 neutrals who applied for new registration and 1510 registration renewals.

#### Year Highlights:

- The Georgia Supreme Court Commission on Dispute Resolution and the Dispute Resolution Section of the State Bar of Georgia awarded the 2015 Chief Justice Harold G. Clarke Award to Edith B. Primm, Esq., Director of the Justice Center of Atlanta, in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the field of alternative dispute resolution in Georgia.



Shinji Morokuma, Program Director, Office of Court Professionals, and Chief Judge Sara Doyle, Court of Appeals, with Edith Primm as she accepts the 2015 Chief Justice Harold G. Clarke Award.

- The 22nd Annual ADR Institute and 2015 Neutrals' Conference, held December 11, 2015, at the State Bar of Georgia in Atlanta, attracted more than 200 attendees, including those who watched live remote broadcasts of the conference at the State Bar

Offices in Tifton and Savannah. The keynote speaker was Dr. Jerry Gale with his presentation on "Mindfulness, Mediation, and Dialogue."

- In January 2016, the Commission on Dispute Resolution and Georgia Commission on Family Violence began working together on a project to update the mediation guidelines used by local ADR programs to screen domestic relations cases and other civil cases to determine if intimate partner violence/abuse (domestic violence) is a factor between the parties. The safety of victims of domestic violence is a Commission on Dispute Resolution priority and the current guidelines will be reviewed to ensure best practices are used based upon the latest research and practices in the fields of mediation and intimate partner violence/abuse.

***The Georgia Magistrate Courts Training Council, which was created by statute in 1983, consists of six members and oversees the training and certification of Magistrate Judges. O.C.G.A. § 15-10-130 et seq.***

The Council, chaired by Chief Judge Mary Kathryn Moss, Magistrate Court of Chatham County, met six times in FY 2016:

- July 9, 2015 – via GoTo Meeting
- September 17, 2015 – via GoTo Meeting
- October 4, 2015 – during the biannual recertification training held at Jekyll Island, GA
- March 3, 2016 – via GoTo Meeting
- April 24, 2016 – during the biannual recertification training held in Athens, GA
- June 23, 2016 – via GoTo Meeting

The Council developed and approved the training curriculum for mandatory annual magistrate training, focusing on such topics as search warrant issuance, mental health treatment resources, landlord/tenant law, criminal case law update, legislative update, garnishment reform, probation and the revised Code of Judicial Conduct. The Council also administered a mentor program for new magistrates. The Council issued certification to magistrate court judges meeting the annual training requirement for CY 2015.

The Georgia Magistrate Courts Training Council submits this report pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 15-10-134(e).



***The Georgia Municipal Courts Training Council, created per O.C.G.A. § 36-32-22, consists of six members and oversees the training and certification of municipal court judges and chief clerks.***

The Council, chaired by Judge Dennis Still, Municipal Court of Lawrenceville, met four times in FY 2016:

- October 9, 2015 – Athens, GA
- January 15, 2016 – Athens, GA
- April 17, 2016 – St. Simons Island, GA
- June 21, 2016 – St. Simons Island, GA

The Council developed and approved the training curriculum for mandatory annual municipal court judges training, focusing on such topics as probation, pre-trial diversion, conditional release, expungement of records, the revised Code of Judicial Conduct, case law update, evidence, and updates from the Department of Driver Services. The Council issued certification to municipal court judges meeting the annual training requirement for CY 2015. Per statutory requirement, the Council also oversaw the training and certification of chief municipal court clerks. The training curriculum for chief clerks focused on such topics as Georgia's Open Records Act, retention schedules, local ordinances/nuisances/abatement, ethics, open courtrooms, Commercial Drivers Licenses, and updates from the Department of Driver Services and the Georgia Crime Information Center. The Council issued certification to chief municipal court clerks meeting the annual training requirement for CY 2015.

The Georgia Municipal Courts Training Council submits this report pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 36-32-24.

July 1, 2015

## Judge Sara Doyle becomes Chief Judge

Judge Sara L. Doyle began her two-year term as Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals of Georgia. Judge Doyle was elected to the Court of Appeals in 2008.



July 15, 2015

## JC/AOC unveils new georgiacourts.gov website

Nearly a year's worth of work, utilizing staff from all JC/AOC Divisions, went into developing a new website that made its debut on July 15, 2015.



**August 2015**

**Dougherty County  
Court Named  
Peer-to-Peer Site by  
Council of State  
Governments**



The Council of State Governments Justice Center, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, selected the Dougherty Superior Court Mental Health and Substance Abuse Division, led by Judge Stephen Goss, above, as one of four peer-to-peer learning sites across the US as part of the National Criminal Justice/Mental Health Collaboration Learning Sites Program.

**July 28, 2015**

**Chief Justice Elected to Board of Directors of CCJ**

Chief Justice Hugh P. Thompson was elected to the Board of Directors of the Conference of Chief Justices, the national organization that represents the highest judicial officers from every state in the country, as well as from the District of Columbia and U.S. territories.



**September 2015**

**Council of Accountability Court Judges (CACJ) signs  
Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Judicial  
Council/AOC**



An MOU for services was signed between the CACJ and the JC/AOC. At left, Judge Jason Deal, CACJ President, hosts a graduation in his court in the Fall of 2015. The CACJ selected Taylor Jones as its Executive Director.

Sep 15, 2015

## Georgia Council of Court Administrators Installs New Board

2015-2016 GCCA Executive Committee, seated, from left, Jeff West, Treasurer; Tracy Johnson, Vice President; Yolanda Lewis, President-Elect; Brad Butler, Immediate Past President. Back row standing, Matthew Sorenson, Stephen Nevells, Stephanie Hines, Frank Baker, and Lynn Ansley.



Sep 15-16, 2015

## DeKalb County Open House Explores Domestic Violence Issues

With support from the Office on Violence Against Women, the Magistrate Court of DeKalb County, Georgia and Center for Court Innovation hosted a two-day open house September 23-24 on domestic violence. Bringing together judges, experts, and court staff from across the country, the open house delved into the urgent questions and challenges facing domestic violence practitioners and courts today.

Sep 30, 2015

## Judge Samuel Ozburn speaks to Judicial Council about court-house security



Judge Samuel Ozburn, Alcovy Judicial Circuit, shared the report of the Superior Court Judges' Security Committee at the September 30 Judicial Council meeting. With the tragedies in Paris, shootings in California and Colorado, the Committee took the initiative to update its Judicial Council Emergency Operations Plan. This plan was last revised in 2005 and Chief Justice Thompson was the task force chair. Ms. Clanton reported that it was time to take a fresh look at it and consult with stakeholders on how best to keep them safe.



November 2015

### Judge Stephen Dillard on Judges Using Social Media Podcast



Judge Dillard, Court of Appeals, is one of a small group of judges who have an active presence on social media. In a podcast on the Lawyerist.com during November 2015, Judge Dillard spoke about why he joined Twitter, what he gets out of it, and whether it is a good tool.

Above, Judge Dillard tweets about a Judicial Council meeting in April 2016.

Nov 3, 2015

### Clanton named AOC Director



On November 3, Chief Justice Hugh Thompson announced that Cynthia H. Clanton was chosen as the new director of Georgia's Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC).

Nov 4-5, 2015

### Child Support Conference Held

The Georgia Commission on Child Support held its first-ever child support conference on November 4-5, 2015, at the Atlanta Marriott Stone Mountain Conference Center. This two-day training focused on all issues involving child support: income withholding, how to calculate support, how to collect support, child support for mediators, case law updates, and more. The Conference was also an opportunity for attendees to get a first look at the Online Child Support Calculator, and provide feedback to the trainers and developer. The attendees were excited about the calculator and looking forward to the release of the final product in 2016.

Below, Bartow Juvenile Court Judge Velma Tilley, Administrative Judge Amanda Baxter, Fulton Superior Court Judge Bensonetta Tipton Lane and DeKalb Superior Court Judge Anthony Scott discuss the effect of the *Obergefell* decision on Georgia's domestic relations cases.



Nov 6, 2015

## Presiding Justice “Big Voice for Children” Recipient

Presiding Justice P. Harris Hines of the Supreme Court of Georgia was honored with a “Big Voice for Children” Award for his commitment to justice for youth and his leadership of the Supreme Court Committee on Justice for Children.



Dec 11, 2015

## 22nd Annual ADR Institute and 2015 Neutrals' Conference



More than 200 attended — in person or online — Dr. Jerry Gale's keynote presentation: “Mindfulness, Mediation, and Dialogue.”

Dec 9, 2015

## Panel on Successful Communications During a High Profile Case or Crisis

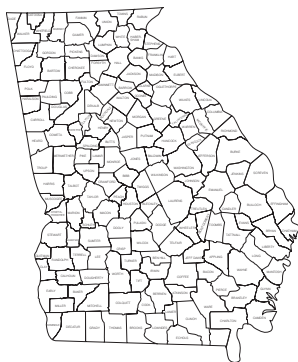
Following the December 9, 2015, Judicial Council meeting, Senior Judge James Bodiford headed a panel discussion on Communications During a High Profile Case or Crisis. Also participating were Mr. Glen Jackson, Jackson Spalding; Jane Hansen, Supreme Court of Georgia PIO, and Ms. Christine Butcher, moderating. The panel was broadcast live via Livestream.



<http://livestream.com/accounts/15641258>

**January 1, 2016**

## **Touch Every Court Project**



The Judicial Council/AOC has made an increased effort to visit the courts around the state. Each “touch” or visit with a court is recorded to capture where JC/AOC services are being utilized and deployed.

## **Dec 17, 2015 Judge Sumner speaks to Justice for Children (J4C)**

Judge John B. Sumner, President, Council of Juvenile Court Judges, spoke to the Committee on Justice for Children regarding proposed legislation to increase judicial salaries.



## **Jan 1, 2016 Three new Judges Join the Court of Appeals**

Judge Brian Rickman, Judge Amanda Mercier, and Judge Nels Peterson joined the Court of Appeals on January 1, 2016.



**Jan 14, 2016      Juvenile Court Judge Recognized with Excellence for Children Award**

Judge Thomas Britt Hammond, Juvenile Court of Glascock, Lincoln, McDuffie, Taliaferro, Warren, and Wilkes counties, was awarded an “Excellence for Children” Award from Casey Family Programs at their National Annual Meeting in Seattle, Washington, on January 14 for his efforts to improve and teach child welfare policy and law in Georgia and nationally.



**Jan 29, 2016      Towaliga Accountability Court Holds 35th Graduation**

Judge Bill Fears, far right, listens to one of five graduates (left) during a ceremony on January 29, 2016.



**Feb 19, 2016**

**Chief Justice Honored by Mercer School of Law**



Chief Justice Hugh P. Thompson received the 2016 Alumni Meritorious Service Award from the Mercer University School of Law on February 19, 2016. The Meritorious Service Award is given to an alumnus or alumna of the Mercer University School of Law who has demonstrated support of the Law School through the contribution of time and gifts.



**Feb 20, 2016**

**Judge Michael Boggs  
named to National  
Task Force on Fines,  
Fees, and Bail  
Practices**



Judge Michael Boggs, Court of Appeals, was appointed to the National Task Force on Fines, Fees, and Bail Practices which is working to address the ongoing impact that court fines and fees and bail practices have on people and communities — especially the economically disadvantaged — across the United States.

**Feb 2, 2016**

**Magistrate Court Day at the Capitol**

Magistrate judges from throughout the state visited the Capitol on February 2, meeting with legislators and Gov. Nathan Deal.



**Feb 23, 2016**

**Probate Court Day at the Capitol**

Probate judges from throughout the state visited the Capitol on February 23, meeting with legislators and Gov. Nathan Deal.



**March 2016**

### **US Department of State Engages Georgia JC/AOC with Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**

Working on the terms of an MOU with Assistant Secretary Brownfield of the U.S. Department of State for JC/AOC work on improving justice not only within Georgia but world-wide.



### **Georgia's Drug Courts Model for Thailand**

Over four days, more than 150 judges from Thai trial and appellate courts learned how Georgia and other U.S. jurisdictions have effectively used drug courts and sentencing alternatives to improve treatment for drug offenders while reducing both incarceration and recidivism. Tom Rawlings participated in the training on behalf of the AOC.



**April 19, 2016**

### **Probate Court Judges Receive Certification from Carl Vinson Institute of Government**

At the Council of Probate Court Judges annual meeting, the first 90 graduates of the Georgia Probate Court Judges Certificate Program received their certification for completing the program's 72-hour professional development curriculum.



**May 17, 2016**

### **Judge Louisa Abbot Honored for Work on Child Support Commission**



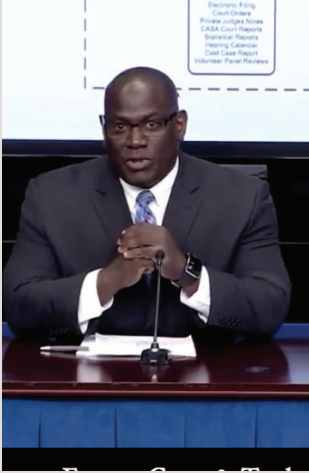
A gubernatorial commendation was issued for Judge Louisa Abbot, Superior Court, Eastern Judicial Circuit on May 17, 2016, for her service on the Child Support Commission, beginning with the inception of the Commission in 2005.

Judge Abbot served as Chair of the Commission from 2013 – 2016.



**May 18, 2016**

### **Judge Vincent Crawford visits the White House**



Judge Vincent Crawford, Juvenile Court of DeKalb County, participated on a panel demonstrating Georgia's Court Process Reporting System at the *White House Foster Care & Technology Hackathon*.

**May 2016**

### **Jonesboro Mock Trial Teams Wins Seventh State Title**

In May 2016, the Jonesboro Mock Trial team, coached by Judge John Carbo, State Court of Clayton County, won its seventh state title since 2002. Read more at [bit.ly/clayton-mocktrial](http://bit.ly/clayton-mocktrial)



**May 18, 2016**

### **Day on the Bench in Columbia County**

Members of the Augusta Judicial Circuit held the first Law Day celebration in Columbia County that gave Columbia County leaders, legislators and other community leaders a look inside the day-to-day operations of the justice system.



<https://livestream.com/accounts/15641258>

## May 26, 2016 DeKalb County State Court Utilizes Interpreter

During a visit by JC/AOC Director Cynthia Clanton to the State Court of DeKalb County, Chief Judge Wayne Purdom handles pleas and bench trials utilizing a foreign language interpreter to ensure that litigants with limited English proficiency fully understand the proceedings.



June 3, 2016

## Commission on Family Violence presents Fatality Review Project Report



Jennifer Thomas, Director of the Georgia Commission on Family Violence, presented the the Georgia Fatality Review Project Report to the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council. The Report focused on the impact of domestic violence against children.

<http://georgiafatalityreview.com/>

## June 7, 2016 Chief Justice Thompson speaks at first Troup County Mental Health Court Graduation

Troup County held its first Mental Health Court graduation on June 7, 2016. Chief Justice Hugh P. Thompson, at left, spoke and recognized Judge A. Quillian Baldwin, Jr. for his work creating the court.





**June 20, 2016**

**Tracy Johnson  
Selected as Executive  
Director of Georgia  
Commission on  
Dispute Resolution**



The Georgia Supreme Court Commission on Dispute Resolution named Tracy Johnson as the Executive Director for the Georgia Office of Dispute Resolution. Tracy previously served as Director of the Fulton County Superior Court Family Division and is active in the Georgia Council of Court Administrators.



**June 17-18, 2016 State Bar Awards**

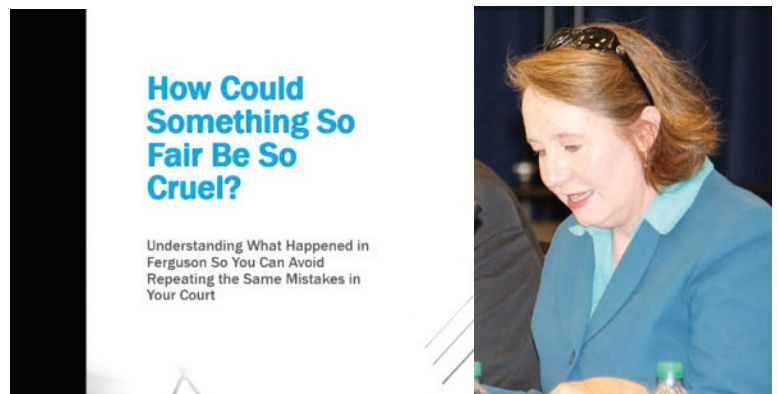
Justice Robert Benham (left), Supreme Court of Georgia, was honored with the 2016 Chief Justice Thomas O. Marshall Professionalism Award, presented June 17 during the Annual Meeting of the State Bar of Georgia.



Northern Judicial Circuit Superior Court Judge R. Chris Phelps (right) of Elberton was honored with the 2016 Distinguished Service Award, presented by the State Bar of Georgia during its annual meeting on June 18.

**June 22, 2016 Georgia Reflections on Ferguson**

Judge Leslie Spornberger Jones taught *Georgia Reflections on Ferguson* to the Council of Municipal Court Judges.



<http://livestream.com/accounts/15641258>

## *Court of Appeals — Appointed*

Brian Rickman	01/01/16
Amanda Mercier	01/01/16
Nels Peterson	01/01/16

## *Superior Courts — Appointed*

Glen A. Cheney	02/15/16	Atlantic Judicial Circuit
John Worcester	04/28/16	Appalachian Judicial Circuit
Mary Elizabeth Priest	04/28/16	Appalachian Judicial Circuit
Eric Norris	04/28/16	Western Judicial Circuit
Dustin Hightower	05/26/16	Coweta Judicial Circuit

## *State Courts — Appointed*

John B. Adams	07/22/15	Charlton
Shondeana Crews Morris	07/30/15	DeKalb
Keisha Storey	07/30/15	DeKalb
Ronald Ramsey Sr.	07/30/15	DeKalb
Brian Ross	07/30/15	DeKalb
William H. Mills	09/08/15	Early
Tammi Hayward	04/28/16	Clayton





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